

Tracking Bristol's Housing Market

By Justin Malley

Savvy stock market investors spend hours analyzing companies before purchasing stock. Investors must evaluate a company's management credentials, growth projections, market competition, and other metrics. The end goal is to invest in a strong company with a stock that is undervalued, with nowhere to go but up. The oldest investment adage will always prevail: buy low; sell high.

Why not consider this time-tested investment strategy when discussing Bristol's housing market?

Like many Connecticut communities, Bristol has weathered property value declines in recent years. Scores of local homeowners invested hard-earned money in residential property only to watch their equity decline year after year. Surely, there is little consolation that can be offered to these folks.

"...potential homebuyers new to the City will be pleasantly surprised at all Bristol offers."

One bright spot, according to many in the real estate industry, is that Bristol home values may have bottomed out, with nowhere to go but up. This begs the question: Can Bristol's residential real estate market, using the stock market analogy above, be considered an "undervalued stock," ripe for the picking by savvy homebuyers? Is this the time for first-time homebuyers, empty nesters looking for a deal on a smaller home, or anyone else interested in purchasing a home to consider a move to the "All Heart City"?

After all, Bristol has many qualities that distinguish it from comparable communities: a quality public school system, second-to-none public parks, a competitive mill rate, dependable municipal services, and much more. Longtime Bristolites may take Bristol's advantages for granted, but potential homebuyers new to the City will be pleasantly surprised at all Bristol offers.

Younger homebuyers, in particular, may also be a target group. Many millennials prefer rental housing within compact, walkable environments. However, rents in these areas, such as West Hartford, New Haven, and elsewhere, are proving steep. Surely there are young professionals who appreciate the value of owning property, but may believe buying a home is out of reach. Historically low interest rates combined with Bristol's plethora of affordable single-family options mean that owning a home in Bristol is more affordable than renting elsewhere. This may be enough to draw millennials to Bristol – including transplants from other states working at Jackson Laboratory in Farmington.

Data Mining

Scott Bayne of Century 21 Bay-Mar Realty on Farmington Avenue is one industry insider who champions the housing value offered in Bristol. "Bristol hit what I call the 'stability stage' about one year ago," he says. "Prices have generally stabilized, and I expect a slow, steady rise in home values over the next several years." Bayne explains that a more measured, predictable rise in home values is preferable to the boom-and-bust cycles we've been accustomed to.



Declining home values in past years was not a phenomenon unique to Bristol. Some data may indicate that Bristol home values dropped more severely than in other markets. However, Bayne notes that most housing data is skewed, revealing little of the true home value picture in Bristol. "Popular websites within the real estate industry calculate average home values for an area based on inventory that is sold over a given time period."

Continued on page 4



In This Issue

- Bristol's Housing Market
- Successful Start-Ups
- Workforce Solutions
- Around Bristol: Quick Bites
- Available Real Estate
- Honoring Public Services

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Great Time to Invest in Bristol

According to the Warren Group, a real estate data firm headquartered in Boston, single family home sales are rebounding in Connecticut. Alas, average home prices are slow to catch up. However, industry experts predict that Bristol home values have stabilized, with a slow rise in prices expected in the coming years. This issue's cover story focuses on the silver lining to the housing crisis: now may be the perfect time for potential homebuyers to take advantage of both low interest rates and Bristol's affordable home prices, both of which are sure to rise in the coming years.



The trick for Realtors, the BDA, and others is to spread the news about the excellent value that Bristol provides homebuyers. After all, new "Bristolites" may volunteer for worthy causes, patronize the City's wonderful businesses, and give back to the community in other ways. Many new homeowners may be young families with children who may grow up to play youth sports, succeed in Bristol schools, and hopefully one day raise their own families in Bristol.

Also in this issue, Kristen Gorski highlights two community-based organizations – BARC and Favarh – offering those with intellectual, physical, and/or developmental disabilities the opportunity to earn a paycheck while working with some of the area's most respected employers. Elsewhere, Dawn Leger spotlights two husband-and-wife owned businesses – Bristol CT Yoga & Café and All Things for All Occasions – making a splash in their new locations. Finally, Debbie Shapiro profiles an award-winning leader at one social services agency that uses Community Development Block Grant funds to serve some of the community's most vulnerable residents.

As we head into the holiday season, the staff of the Bristol Development Authority would like to thank you for supporting economic and community development in Bristol. We wish everyone a Happy Holiday and prosperous New Year!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Justin Malley".

Justin Malley
Director, Bristol Development Authority

Bristol Start-Ups Aim to Please

By Dawn Leger

Two local businesses have stepped up from small beginnings into more visible locations, hoping to attract new customers and raise their company profiles as well as revenues. Coincidentally, both are operated by husband-and-wife teams with expansive visions for their businesses.

Bristol CT Yoga & Café was established in 2014 by Nisha Whitfield and Sebastian Szewczyk. Originally offering a variety of yoga classes in a basement studio at the former Callen School on Pine Street, Bristol CT Yoga has added a Café and moved to a large and welcoming space at the intersection of Terryville Avenue (Rt. 6) and Clark Avenue. Sebastian fulfilled his dream to open a Café at the new location, providing healthy selections that offer another dimension of nourishment to customers seeking a break from their hectic lives.



The couple seeks to provide a serene atmosphere, without being "preachy," that gives people an accessible place to nourish themselves. Nisha, a trained actress and yoga teacher, says that she has found people craving a place like this, where they can

connect with themselves as well as like-minded people and escape from the stress of the everyday.

"If people can find that balance, and feel connected to themselves, it makes for a better home life and work life, and they can manage their stress better," she says. "It translates into all areas of life."



The business motto – "Inspired Living" – is present in all the offerings at Bristol CT Yoga & Café. There are obviously yoga classes of all types and for all levels; there is also meditation class and therapeutic massage available from four licensed massage therapists. The café features healthy juices, smoothies, salads and sandwiches, and fresh-brewed coffees and teas. Rotating art shows feature the work of local artists on the walls, and workshops are planned that will introduce topics about healthy nutrition, ways to stay healthy in the winter, and making positive lifestyle choices.

Bristol Start-Ups Aim to Please

Nisha points out that the needs of the clients come first in this service-oriented business. She has added new classes, changed schedules, and encourages feedback from everyone. "We're not here for us, we're here for you," she says. "I'm dedicated to the customers and the community, and I'm so grateful to have the opportunity to be able to do what I love in this supportive place."

Limiting class size benefits the student as well as the teacher, who experiences less stress when the studio is not jammed with bodies. "We want to make sure the instructor can connect with everyone in the class," Nisha says. "We'd rather add another class than overbook the ones we have on the schedule." There are 12 teachers, including Nisha, with many different style classes.

*"Our mission is to make yoga accessible...
It can be anything you want it to be."
- Nisha Whitfield*

Bristol CT Yoga & Café is open seven days a week, offering 30 classes during the week between 6:30 a.m. to 7:45 p.m. every day. Visit the website (www.bristolctyoga.com) for details as class times may change to reflect demand. An introductory pass is available for new customers to take unlimited classes for \$25 in the first month of membership. This pass enables individuals to try new teachers or modalities, or to experience yoga for the first time with a low-cost commitment. The studio also has a strong following on Facebook, where special events are posted as well as testimonials by students.

All Things For All Occasions is a small gift shop with a wide variety of products available. In fact, the store has so many things going on, your eyes jump from one display to another constantly. And when owner Donna Nieves says "all," she really means it.

"There's not enough room here to display everything we do," Donna says of the small store at 186 West Street where she and husband Rey have been located since August.

"Just because you don't see it, doesn't mean I don't do it – Just ask," she says. "That's our business motto." Nieves makes many of the items in her shop and she is also an independent consultant for several product lines, including **Thirty-one** bags (a line of purses, totes, and wallets) and **Pink Zebra** home fragrances. There is a candle bar in the store where customers can create their own unique gifts, party favors, and scents.

Donna and Rey have been in business for several years, operating out of their home and selling through craft fairs and online. This past summer, they decided to "take the plunge" and open a storefront location in the West End.

"Business has been slow here," Donna said. "I hope people aren't afraid of the location. The West End is not a bad place. I was nervous at first, but I've found it to be very comfortable. There's plenty of parking, and there are always police walking around the neighborhood. There's no worries here."

Parking is available behind the shop, which shares a small building with Vallee Shoe Repair, right next to the bridge over the Pequabuck River. Parking is also allowed on the street, Donna says, and in the public parking lot on the corner of School Street.



Wide variety of gifts
at All Things for All Occasions

Nieves is hoping that the business in the store will enable her to cut down on the number of fairs that she must work in order to sell her products. "It's hard to be lugging tables and product everywhere," she says. Creating customized products, such as baskets and favors for weddings or showers, is one of her favorites. "I love to make centerpieces, diaper cakes, and gift baskets for any theme," Donna says. "I can do things for any price range."

*"Just tell me what you're looking for,
and I'll customize the gift for you."
- Donna Nieves*

One wall of the store is covered with hair bows, headbands, and barrettes. Donna does special orders for cheerleading squads, and she can create any design upon request. Visit the Facebook page to see samples of the many different looks at <https://www.facebook.com/allthingsforalloccasions/>. The store is open Monday through Friday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.; 860-899-7268.

Holiday decorations include candy wreaths and ornaments, which are also customizable for size, candy preference, and color accents. Check out the hand-knitted scarves and accessories, and find unique gifts while supporting a Bristol small business at **All Things for All Occasions**. ♦

Tracking Bristol's Housing Market

Continued from page 1

For example, if five \$100,000 starter homes sell in Bristol in one month, many websites report the average home value in Bristol for that month as \$100,000. Obviously, this number only represents the homes that sold, not the thousands of more expensive homes off the market. Making matters worse, much of the housing turnover in Bristol during the recent recession occurred within the entry level market, with inexpensive homes changing hands more frequently than pricier homes. This affected the data held by many real estate websites.

From Historic to New Construction

Other communities may offer affordable single family homes, but many look the same and offer similar amenities. These communities may have been developed more recently than Bristol, so they have a surplus of entry level homes built in the 1940s, for instance, with similar layouts. Bristol, on the other hand, is unique in that it boasts a wide variety of reasonably priced for-sale properties that will appeal to different types of buyers. Where Bristol's affordability truly comes into play is when considering two extremes in the housing market: charming historic properties and spectacular newly-constructed homes.

On Federal Hill and in other areas, throngs of homebuyers interested in historic details and character can purchase



large, ornate homes for reasonable prices. Adam and Regina von Gootkin came to Bristol as potential homeowners searching for a unique historic home. Like many new homeowners from outside Bristol, the von Gootkins were attracted to a Bristol home *first* and quickly fell in love with the community *second*.

"Six years ago, we landed in Bristol exclusively because of the affordable historic home we found," Adam says. "The E.D. Rockwell House on Federal Hill had been partially restored and it was only the second house we looked at. As we learned more about the City, we began to appreciate Bristol's rich history, the beautiful historic homes around us, and the diversity."

Von Gootkin explains that when he bought his home, similarly ornate historic homes in West Hartford or Farmington were priced unjustifiably high. "Additionally, our taxes are low, making Bristol much more competitive. On Federal Hill, we're within walking distance of Parkside Cafe for breakfast, Barley Vine for moonshine on a snowy day, or a freshly brewed pint from Firefly Brewing. Right behind us is a quaint town green that features concerts throughout the summer."

Bristol's housing values extend beyond historic homes: newly constructed properties continue to sprout up throughout the City. Bill LePage of LePage Homes Inc. has built new



homes in communities across the state, with his most recent project taking shape on Woodshire Circle off Allentown Road. The development will feature 30 detached homes and eight duplexes.

"We're targeting almost any type of buyer, offering two-, three-, and four-bedroom units at very competitive price points," LePage notes. "Affordable" and "new construction" are words that rarely go together, but LePage explains that

Continued on page 6

Getting an Edge on Home Sales

Attention Realtors and anyone selling a home in Bristol: Use the BDA's Residential Housing Rehabilitation Program to help sell your property. The program provides grants up to \$5,000 for owner-occupied single family homes and up to \$1,500 for each additional unit of an owner-occupied multifamily dwelling. The grants are available to fund 50% of the cost of eligible home improvements, including new roofs, new HVAC systems, new energy efficient windows, and more.

For example, if a home for sale is in need of a new roof, it may be appropriate to urge the potential purchaser to

contact the BDA to learn more about obtaining grant funds. The opportunity to acquire grant funds may help close the sale!



Potential homebuyers must contact the Bristol Development Authority at 860-584-6185 to learn if they meet criteria to participate, which includes limits on household income. ♦

Community-Based Workforce Solutions

By Kristen Gorski

Two community-based organizations are offering workforce solutions for local businesses while providing personal growth for their members. The Bristol Adult Resource Center (BARC) and Favarh (also known as the Arc of the Farmington Valley) serve and support persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

BARC and Favarh both offer programs and services that give their members with intellectual and developmental disabilities meaningful employment while allowing them to grow their independence. Both organizations help members secure community jobs where their skills can be effectively utilized while allowing higher-paid employees to focus on more sophisticated, problem-solving work.

Favarh, located in Canton, offers several programs for its members that businesses can utilize. The first is its Group Supported Employment (GSE) program which provides companies with crews of four workers and one job coach to do complex yet routine tasks. The job coach, who supports and manages the crew members, is provided free of charge. The crews work in a variety of job sites such as manufacturing, warehouses, laundries, healthcare facilities, restaurants, hotels, retail, and offices.

"People with significant intellectual and developmental disabilities can do complex and routine jobs leaving higher skilled and educated employees to focus on aspects of the job more fitting to their pay grade. This is a cost effective and strategic advantage that is catching on," says Stephen E. Morris, Executive Director of Favarh.

One Bristol business that has been using a crew from Favarh is Rowley Spring and Stamping Corp. "The crew lights up the room every day with their energy and their enthusiasm. We watch them grow, interact, learn, and have



Assembly work at
Rowley Spring and Stamping

fun. We are delighted with their influence on our organization and our culture. They are proud of their achievements and contributions to our business. We all feel lucky to have them as part of the Rowley family," says Bill Joyce, Personnel and Accounting Manager at Rowley Spring.

The U.S. Department of Labor has provided Favarh with a special certificate that encourages employers to use their client workers, allowing them to offer very cost-effective wages. In addition, the client workers remain on Favarh's payroll, with Favarh acting as a vendor. Favarh also offers an individual employment program where a single person

with intellectual or developmental disabilities works at a job site with limited job coach support; and a contract services program where clients remain at Favarh to do volume mailing, shredding, scanning, and small assembly jobs.

*"The crew lights up the room every day
with their energy and their enthusiasm."*

- Bill Joyce

BARC Benefits

BARC also offers a variety of employment options for its members. In the supported employment program, two types of employment options are available: the individual placement and the enclave placement. During individual placement, a job coach will remain on the job site to provide training until the worker is able to independently perform the job to their employer's satisfaction. Enclave placement is available for those who require more support in order to maintain their employment. An enclave consists of several workers employed at the same job site with a job coach who remains on site for the entirety of their employment who can provide training and assistance as necessary.

BARC provides members with classroom training prior to their placement during the Job Readiness program. Here, BARC provides practical and helpful tips along with strategies that are useful in a variety of employment opportunities. Clients are coached on how to fill out a job application, how to prepare for a job interview, the proper way to dress during employment and how to interact with customers and employers. This work activity is a place to improve on job skills and abilities clients may already possess, and to teach them how to be successful on the job.

BARC members are employed in areas such as food service, retail, and administrative services. While on site, members perform a variety of tasks, including: bagging groceries, silverware-roll preparation, cart collecting, food preparation, maintenance, and housekeeping. Anyone interested in hiring BARC members should contact Paul Arruda at 860-582-9102.

Christopher Jones, the assistant manager of the Walmart Neighborhood Market in Bristol, says it's a pleasure to have the individuals from BARC be a part of the Walmart family. "It's so important to have these wonderful, conscientious, and hard-working people included in the Bristol community," he says.

BARC also offers a variety of other programs such as food service at **The Hidden Café** and **Grinders-On-The-Go**, horticulture at the **Jerome Gardens** greenhouse, the art program, the candy program, **BARC Bites**, and more. ♦

For more information on Favarh, please contact Bill Neagus, Favarh's Business Developer: (860) 693-6662 x120, email: wneagus@favarh.org, or visit: www.favarh.org.

For more information on the Bristol Adult Resource Center (BARC), please call: (860) 261-5592, email: bristolarc@bristolarc.org, or visit: www.bristolarc.org.

Tracking Bristol's Housing Market

Continued from page 4

his company is in a position to work with buyers on price because he understands that being flexible will help his development stand out from similar projects in surrounding communities.

"New construction in other communities may be out of reach for many homebuyers," LePage notes. "But from day one [on this project] we've focused on delivering a quality product at a very reasonable price. We understand the market still has a way to go to get back to previous levels. We're realistic with our pricing."

The Woodshire Circle development stands out in other ways as well. First, it is not an age-restricted community. Rather, the development will offer something for everyone: from convenient first-floor bedrooms for older residents to four-bedroom homes and larger back yards for young families.

Additionally, the community is designated as an "open space development" so the neighborhood will always be bordered by several wooded acres that must remain undeveloped.

Rental Housing in Demand

In addition to the uptick in property sales, the City is also enjoying a resurgence of newly constructed rental property. Tabacco & Son Builders is wrapping up construction on six



New market-rate rental construction near downtown is in high demand

rental units on Ingraham Street, a stone's throw from downtown. The two buildings feature garages, spacious kitchens, and other amenities coveted by both buyers and renters alike.

Bob and Tom Tabacco, owners of the company, intend to rent the properties in the short term, with the possibility of selling the units as condominiums in the future. "We're not even finished with the project and we have people calling to occupy the apartments," they say. "The need for newly constructed rental housing is there."

Real estate developer Pat Snow agrees. Snow has developed several multifamily and mixed-use properties downtown, with the goal of continuing to convert average properties into high quality residential developments in the area. According to Snow, rehabilitating homes provides the opportunity for quality rental housing or the ability to sell multifamily homes to responsible owners, with an eye toward owner-occupants.

In addition, the former O'Connell, Bingham, and Jennings Schools are slated for conversion to rental housing. Developer Ted Lazarus of Bristol Enterprises LLC will convert O'Connell and Bingham to approximately 87 market rate senior housing apartments. The property will feature energy efficient geothermal heating, welcoming common areas, and the historic charm of the former schools.

At the former Jennings School, D'Amato Construction is planning a dynamic mixed-use project with approximately 30 one-bedroom and two-bedroom senior living apartments and



Mixed use development is planned for the historic Jennings School property

Bristol Preschool occupying the building's lower floor. The property will feature many unique amenities, including separate garages for the living units, common eating and recreation space, a dog run, outdoor grill area, and more.

"We're positioning the project as a high-end development for the area's older residents who don't want the responsibilities of owning and maintaining single-family homes," explains Ed D'Amato Sr. "They may live locally year 'round or spend the colder months in Florida and expect an inviting, well-maintained property to return to in Bristol."

From entry level homes, to one-of-a-kind historic properties, to shiny new construction, Bristol's housing market has something to offer any buyer. Homes can be purchased at a fraction of the cost of wealthier communities, and Bristol offers the conveniences of a larger municipality with the feeling of a smaller town. It is time that potential homebuyers across the state learn the true value that Bristol offers new families, empty nesters, millennials beginning their homeownership journey, and anyone interested in buying a home. ♦



AROUND BRISTOL: QUICK BITES



Wayback Burgers at 123 Farmington Avenue in the Bristol Commons is a fast-casual burger joint serving fresh, never-frozen beef patties, hand-dipped milkshakes, fries, and many other items. Specials include seasonal sandwiches, onion rings, and shakes. The family-friendly restaurant also offers free kids' meals on Wednesdays (with the purchase of other items), and hosts charitable events to support local fundraisers.



It! Candy has moved to 116 East Main Street in the former Forestville Shoe Hospital. Located just down the road from Forestville Center, It! Candy now has plenty of parking, and is easily accessible from Rt. 72. Visit Karen and check out the wonderful gluten-free goodies in her shop, which was featured on the Food Network in August 2015.



The **Pavilion Restaurant** has changed ownership and has undergone some renovations at its location at 781 King Street. The menu retains the classic pizza and Italian dishes that made this restaurant one of Bristol's favorites. Upgrades to the kitchen, bathrooms, and dining room freshen up to a familiar family restaurant.

REAL ESTATE CORNER



For Sale

384 Farmington Avenue **Contact:** Joel Witkiewicz 860-585-5635

This newer property features over 12,000 square feet, with more than 7,000 square feet on the upper levels and a 5,400 square foot warehouse/basement with overhead door access. The well-maintained property is located on a corner lot with high traffic counts.

For Lease

71 Horizon Drive **Contact:** Chris Metcalfe 860-525-9171

Soaring ceilings, a heavy duty crane system, and a prime industrial park location is what you'll find at this property. The building covers over 60,000 square feet with ample office space and parking.



For Sale

224 North Main Street **Contact:** O.V. Snow 860-589-5492

This nearly 6,000 square foot property boasts a prime downtown location with dedicated parking as well as on-street parking available. Built in 1985, the building features a newer roof, 16-foot ceilings, a drive-in rear door, and much more.



To see more, visit "Available Properties" at www.bristolct.gov/BDA

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORNER

Public Service Programs Invest in Bristol

By Debra Shapiro

The annual Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds Public Service programs in addition to the popular Housing Rehabilitation Program. The federal government limits the City to utilizing 15% of the CDBG award for assisting Public Service agencies. Funding decisions are made according to the priorities in the Five-Year Consolidated Plan. In the current year, allocations were made to the Prudence Crandall Center (for programs associated with domestic violence), St. Vincent De Paul (emergency shelter), Bristol Boys and Girls Club (Cambridge Park youth outreach), Christian Fellowship Center (food pantry and soup kitchen), and Bristol Community Organization (case management for access to benefits). The programs funded can change from year to year.



Did you know that one of these programs is a recipient of several awards for its work in Bristol? The Bristol Boys and Girls Club (BBGC) has been honored with two Regional Awards of Merit given by the New England Council/National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials for the *Learn for Life Series* and *Summer Learning* programs. The Connecticut Community Development Association gave a Partnership Award to the program.

Most recently, Jay Maia, BBGC unit director, received the 2015 Maytag Dependable Leader Award for helping children stay on the path of success. This award came with a check for \$20,000, some of which was quickly used to present scholarships to six college students, all former members of the program and award winners in their own right.

Jay was chosen as one of 11 recipients amongst 4,200 Boys and Girls Clubs in the United States. "I started at the bottom and just kept continuing to work my way up," says Mr. Maia. He is proud of "his kids" and co-workers that are part of the team. Speaking directly to the students at the award event, he acknowledged that there is a "long road ahead" and that they must "strive for excellence."

BDA staff and commissioners have witnessed many of the activities provided at Cambridge Park and share Jay's sense of pride for Bristol and its up-and-coming community leaders. Without question, the federal funding allocated to the Bristol Boys and Girls Club is a solid investment. ♦



Michael Suchopar, Jay Maia, and scholarship recipients

CDBG Funds Assisted These Organizations Last Year



Cambridge Park Outreach



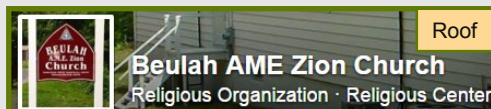
Transitional Housing



Case Management



Oil Tank Removal



Roof



Emergency Fire Alarm Panel



Windows



HVAC



Food Pantry/Soup Kitchen



Safety